

TAP INDEX

NARRATOR Karl Jorgensen

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

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Interview with Karl Jorgensen
Date of Interview: May 15, 1985, Historical Museum, SYV
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction. Karl Jorgensen was Editor and Publisher of the Santa Ynez Valley News from 1945 to 1975. We met at the Library of the Historical Museum to talk about his life and experiences at the newspaper. Later on in the interview a friend of Mr. Jorgensens, Phil Lockwood came in to join in the interview.

PL: You told me that when you were very young and came to Solvang with your parents, you could not speak with your Danish grandparents?

Mr. J: Right.

PL: Did they come directly from Denmark, here?

Mr. J: Like practically all Danes they headed for Minneapolis and then my uncle Alfred heard about Solvang, that was at the time Solvang was being settled, he arrived in 1913 and his parents, my grandparents came out with him. They kept house for Uncle Alfred when he started a mercantile-grocery store in Solvang.

PL: Where was the store located?

Mr. J: On Main Street which is now called Copenhagen Drive, where the Iron Art store is now. He had a grocery and hardware store. I could not understand my grandparents but Uncle Alfred would translate for me. At the time I was 6 or 7 years old and there wasn't much reason for conversation

with them. I should tell you that my mother, maybe I am skipping ahead, she understood some Danish, my mother was a very understanding and delightful person, but before going into that you wanted to know about my grandparents. I knew very little about them since they could not understand me. My mother's parents died before I was born. My father came to this country not knowing a word of English. There were three boys in the family and they came from Holbeck which is an island close to Denmark. My father knew very little about the pleasures of youth because he, as some families did, the oldest child was sent to help with the farm work. My father being the oldest of the children was sent to help the grandparents and was a servant, a helper to these older people. Consequently he didn't know the pleasures of being a child. He became an adult at the age of 12 or 13, and was farming and plowing so he never really had a chance. He came to this country to make a living. Denmark was over populated and there wasn't the opportunity there as in this country, so he came to America not knowing a word of English. He went to work in Minneapolis digging ditches for the gas and electric company and at night went to school. He learned English and Bookkeeping.

PL: Did he come alone?

Mr. J: Yes, he came alone. He became a Public Accountant and went to work in a department store there and met my mother. I will skip my mother's youth, but actually she

had a more trying youth as she was born and raised over a railroad depot. My grandfather was a station master and there were three boys and one girl in the family. They had to pump their water up to the second story and they had a cow tethered down in a field near the depot so it was partly farming and partly railroading. Eventually the family moved to the city, Chicago, and went to work for the railroad and for utilities. At this department store, Mother and Father met. A marriage of a Yankee and a Dane. They loved one another very much and there was never any discord or arguments at all. Mother was very understanding. She, knowing that my Danish grandparents could not speak English, she learned Danish. My father found a woman who taught Mother Danish. In addition she learned to cook Danish food which came in handy in the future. My father was sickly, he had a kidney disease, died at the age of 50 but now I am jumping ahead.

I was born in Chicago April 12, 1920 and we moved to Los Angeles when I was 4 years old. Father became very proficient at his job, he was an efficiency expert as well as an accountant and was in demand by large firms and he got a job out in Los Angeles with the Pacific Gas and Electric Co., so we moved out to California. He was getting a good salary but another reason was to be nearer to his parents in Solvang. Consequently we would drive up to Solvang from L.A. often and in those days the journey was an all day affair, a narrow treacherous road.

PL: Is your brother, Paul older or younger than you?

Mr. J: Paul is four years older than I, he became...I guess it is understandable that in this interview that we jump around...my mother took it upon herself that on my father's death at 50, she would see that her boys got an education. Paul went on to school and became a PhD., a full professor of English at UCLA. He was a remarkable student. He took his first years of college at Santa Barbara State, and was very good at math. He took all the math courses they had to offer and then took English courses which he enjoyed so much he changed his major to English, then he transferred to Berkeley.

PL: Do you remember the trip coming from Chicago to Los Angeles, was it by train?

Mr. J: No, we drove all the way. That was quite an undertaking in those days. In those days many of the roads were dirt, we took Route 66 to Santa Fe, and we knew some of the route. You can understand my going back to my mother, she was such a comfort to my father who was not in the best of health.

PL: Did your mother drive some of the way?

Mr. J: I don't remember about that, my uncle came along and helped drive, my mother's brother.

Then we would come to visit in Solvang, and I remember when I was five coming at Christmas time and in the summers and I remember Solvang as being a very nice place. There was a problem though, if you were not Danish or had

Danish ties you might not be accepted. This was so clear for years, my wife Helen found that out when she came, being on the outside. I remember Solvang from those early days, no electricity, kerocene lanterns, drawing water from a pump. When we were here at Christmas I remember the delightful times, all this homemade food cooked on wood stoves, the big black, highly polished stove. My Uncle Alfred moved to Solvang with all the furniture, tables, chairs, all the furnishings from home. He brought out complete furnishings. He was a bachelor and stayed with my grandparents. There was another brother, Axel, who helped out in the beginning of the store but later he went to L.A and worked down there. Eventually he came back and went into the real estate business.

PL: It was in the 1930's that you came up to Solvang to live?

Mr. J: Yes, it was 1931 and I was in school at the old Solvang Grammer School and it was located on Alisal Rd. and Mission Drive, where the Denmark Square complex is now. Would you believe that I had Jeannette Lyons as my teacher and principal? She taught three grades in one room and was the principal, and also took care of her parents. A remarkable woman. I loved her very much. She was the best teacher I ever had. A friend as well as teacher. When I came to school I found that I was joining a clls of 6 girls that had been together since starting school, a very jealous goup, of being all girls. None of them live here now. Jean Lyons was one and Betty Hollister was one.

Needless to say they were very disappointed to have me joining the class. This close group of girls, to have a BOY come in! At the time I was not much impressed with girls, so I was not happy with the arrangement either. When I came to school the first day I was not aware of clothing, what kids wore to school. In Los Angeles all the boys were wearing knicker-bochers, imagine that! So I came to school that first day and here all the boys were wearing bib overalls. I was a little late and came upon all the students out saluting the flag and found every boy wearing a bib overall. That evening I told my mother that I was mortified and the next day When I went off to school I was wearing a bib overall!

PL: You went all grades there through 8th grade?

Mr. J: Yes, and then on to high school. Probably someone has mentioned that the grade I was in went to high school in three different buildings. The old high school on the hill in Santa Ynez, that was condemned due to earthquake laws, class in tents, and then in the new high school, located where it is now. So we all went to school in tents. Each class had it's tent which illustrates the size of the school in those days.

PL: Wasn't it cold in the tents?

Mr. J: No, each tent had a wood burning stove, here we come back to wood burning stoves. We had a janitor who brought in the wood. As boys one of our summer jobs was spent cutting wood for the winter months. The wood burning

stoves had water pipes that would furnish hot water as well.

PL: I would like to tell these reviewing this interview that Mr. Jorgensen's friend, Phil Lockwood has come to join us. And we will bring Mr. Lockwood in when Mr. Jorgensen talks about the Santa Ynez Valley News.

Mr. J: Maybe this would be a good time to talk about how I became connected with the Valley News. Here I go again bring up my mother. I had a very ambitious mother, she did not like to see kids idle so she learned that the newspaper was looking for a printer's devil. A printer's devil takes care of all the devilish clean-up jobs, janitor, washing presses and one could eventually become an apprentice. This job I worked at after school a couple of hours and on Saturdays, for all this I claimed the salary of \$2.00 a week. Which was good in those days for a boy. And in time I had learned the printing trade. Walt Hanson was editor and publisher then. Let me explain, I don't want to reflect on Walt's salary for me, because \$2.00 was the going rate. I learned to set type, made up printing jobs, letter heads, ran them off on the press and also this was my claim to fame, being chosen I think for being a future publisher. I knew how to sweep the floor, (Laughter) clean windows. Let me explain that a publisher has to be very flexible, he has to be able to classify ads, run the linotype and press, set up the type, so really a publisher in most stages wasn't a distinguished job. It was a job

that required being a mechanic for one thing. You have to be able to repair the linotype, and that machine is tremendous and anything could go wrong at any time.

PL: Did you ever have time for vacations?

Mr. J: Actually... let me introduce Richard Kintzel. He was a very good friend of my brother. They went through school together. After World War II he came up on a Saturday to see me and compare notes, he was overseas in the neighborhood of where I was. I spent 3 1/2 years overseas, he almost the same time. My journey took me to Australia, New Guinea, Dutch East Indies, Phillipines, and Okinawa. The reason I am mentioning this is that you asked me about the war years. We were on the beach at Okinawa ready to go to Japan when the truce was signed.

PL: Were you drafted?

Mr. J: No, I was ready to be drafted so I beat them to the punch,(laughter) so instead I enlisted because I didn't want to go into the infantry. I enlisted in the Signal Corps which became attached to the Army Air Corps and in turn the Air Corps put us with the infantry so I ended up with the infantry after all!(laughter) We installed rough communications for advance air strips and we would move with the infantry.

Back to Richard Kintzel.. he was with the engineers in another area and we were just discussing our war experiences overseas that day and my mother did not like to see boys sitting around doing nothing, so she said,

"Boys, the Valley News is for sale! Walt and Melba Hanson are sick and tired of the paper and maybe you could make a deal!"

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

So we went over and talked to the Hansons and the next morning we were publishers of the Santa Ynez Valley News.

PL: Was it a shock?

Mr. J: It was a shock, it was a shock that lasted thirty years.

PL: Was Phil Lockwood employed by the Hansons at the paper?

Mr. J: No, Phil was around the corner.

Mr. L: I was secretary, first secretary of the County Farm Bureau and had an insurance office too. I had the insurance business that Bill Wagner has now, Farmers Insurance. I went to work for Walt Hanson for the magnificent sum of 8 dollars a week, when I finished high school, and I was there until 1935. Then I went to a newspaper in Atascadero for a couple of years. Then I came back to Solvang in 1938 worked for Walt a little and then had the insurance business and Farm Bureau. I remember well when Karl and Dick took over the newspaper.

Mr. J: In 1945 we bought the paper and I worked my fool head off! Let me explain that if Phil hadn't been around the corner at the Farm Bureau I don't think we could have made it!

So many times the linotype would hang up, foul up and Phil had a magical touch, he would come up and fix it, you wouldn't think it was important but it was.

Mr. L: There are so many things that can go wrong with that machine. They are very sensitive things.

Mr. J: So many little parts, a linotype makes slugs of type from which the newspaper is printed, it forms the lines of type. Molten lead, the molten lead slugs are formed by brass keys that have impressions of the letters on them and these keys line up in molten metal is poured against them and it makes the slugs.

PL: And is the operator sitting there doing this?

Mr. J: He sits there and hits the proper keys to make the letters. Just like a typewriter, the idea is the same. The keyboard is not. After you get your 13 lines you lift the carriage and start on the next line. the little slugs make up the bulk of all the reading material in the paper. This does not happen today, though. There are two things you do with the old slugs, one, you can....every Saturday I would go out in the back yard and light a fire under a huge iron pot and melt it all. Walt used the lead over and over. We should explain that this huge machine was installed through the front window of the newspaper office. For one thing it was good public relations, it brought the people to look at it and also there was no room for it in the back of the shop. Furthermore there was no room to get it into the front shop except by the

window. Whenever you were working on this machine there were people at the window watching you. Everyday you were doing public relations.

PL: Just you and Mr. Kintzel worked at the paper?

Mr. J: Yes, in those days there were floating printers that would come by, these were tramps or hobos and they seemed to know when a job was available. Walt usually had one of them working for him. There was a little cement building in the back of the newspaper office, living quarters that they could use. Let me explain that the Valley News in those days was not a sophisticated paper or had a beautiful building. It looked about like an old garage. The lighting was a matter of bulbs strung over the shop from the ceiling. It was located on Main Street where the Solvang Bakery is now, next to the two story building.

PL: Mr. Lockwood, did you have any experience before starting to work for Walt Hanson?

Mr. L: No, but I had experience in writing, and that was one reason he hired me. I did a lot of writing. Of course I ran the paper by myself for about a year when Mr. Hanson was sick. At that time I didn't write anything, as I was sitting at the linotype machine.

PL: How did you get the news for the paper?

Mr. J: It was Mostly valley news. In those days the paper was almost composed entirely of what we called social news. "Mrs. Jones went to Santa Barbara," this card party or that social event, with lots of names. In those days it was

what people wanted in their paper and I think they still want some of that now. A measure of a good paper was the measure of how many names you put in. The more names, the more successful you were. And women reporters wrote these columns, society items and they were called correspondants.

PL: How did you finance the paper?

Mr. J: Thats a good question! It was mostly touch and go! At one time you operated by taking in a chicken or a bag of potatoes, but fortunately when we came along there was money. In those days the business community of the Valley comprised of one block of Main Street (Copenhagen Drive) plus the bank, and they were no help in you wanted money.

Mr. L: Really in those days there was no reason to advertize, be cause people did all their own shopping in that one block. And there was no need for specials, people had to buy here or go to Lompoc or Santa Barbara. So really what I remember as the Valley News was, we bought four pages preprinted, printed up in San Francisco with weekly news of the nation, receipes, all this was sold to weekly newspapers such as ours. That left four blank pages that you could print yourself so we ended up with four reprinted and four done by ourselves. And it was current for that week, the news. The preprinted was send down by truck so we really didn't have a tremendous amount to set up except you were doing practically all of it by yourself. Subscriptions to the paper were \$2.50 a

year. On top of that the advertizing was 25 cents an inch. Also you gave a "break" to your better customers. I remember Nielsen and Rasmussen, we used to give them a break of 18 cents a copy and there was no money in that. You could barely hang on. And the classified ads took up a couple of columns where they now take page after page. There were never any housing for rent. People here were permanent, they came and built and stayed. And if they were rented, it was already spoken for before the tenant left.

PL: You say, Mr. Jorgensen, that the paper did not make a living for you?

Mr. J: Oh no, but you can't get off of it once you are in it, there are these people (that you employ) once the paper starts growing but it wasn't growing that much that we had great prosperity. Just more business.

Mr. L: I know that when I was there I lost money, I lost money considering the hours that I put in a week, I was working for 2 cents an hour. It was hardly worth the trouble as I look back on it. That is not true today, newspapers are making money. I had a sick wife and sick son so it was hard.

Mr. J: It is exactly what I would say myself, there was no money in the business. I would work night and day, up until 12 o'clock at night, Saturdays and Sundays, and I was making about 100 dollars a month. When the going wage here in the Valley was 2,000 dollars a month. Right up until the

time I retired and sold out, I was making maybe 500 dollars a month. Off set printing was much quicker an operation and instead of quality people, you could now hire less qualified people. We had always prided ourselves on accuracy and putting out a quality product. In former days we used a micrometer to get accurate measurements now they take a yardstick to roughly measure. Naturally I am a little bitter and that is one reason I got out, we lost good printing.

Mr. L: You talked about hring less qualified people, Karl, they do not know what they are doing or how to divide the work properly, nor did they ever look up words in the dictionary. Any publication you will find misspelled words and that sort of thing. There is a different feeling today. we were perfectionists, and thats nothing to be these days. Incidentally you were talking about your correspondants, the best one we had was Josie Jorgensen. Karl's mother.

Mr. J: She knew everything that was going on, but she was not a prier but she knew people and they told her what was happening here. She had a coffee shop and bafore that she worked at the laundry, and at Midland School as a cook. During the war she took over a coffee shop which was an immediate success, she had a magically touch with food. Let me say that she was the one to broke the barrier with the Danes. She and Jeannette Lyons were much loved by the Danes.

PL: And she was a great help to you?

Mr. J: She was no longer a correspondant for the Valley News when I took over, but she would tell us certain things.

Mr. L: Other correspondants were Mrs Clarence Jones from Santa Ynez, she covered Santa Ynez like a blanket. Evelyn Buell was also one. These people were important as we could not cover the valley as they did, and they were at these parties and events. And we paid them too. I think it was 10 cents an inch. The ladies enjoyed it, it was fun. One of the problems I ran into was I got lead poisoning from working at the paper, and I was in the hospital for three months, thats why I had to give up the business.

PL: What about the depression and the Valley?

Mr. J: We came here during the depression, 1931, no one starved, we had to tighten our belts, we didn't eat the delectecies that we had had. I remember having beans three times a day, which reminds me of Grace Lyons Davison's book, "Beans for Breakfast." I remember bean sandwiches, and I hated them but it was food. I helped in the bean fields and got a sack of beans as wages. Solvang and the Valley was not destitute mainly because it was a small community. We didn't have an over supply of laborers or factories, it was a farming community and there were things to eat. My father thought we should come up here as knew we would not starve.

Mr. L: I remember that my father and I cut wood to make ends meet and with a two man saw, a cord of wood was ten dollars and

that was delivered. We would go to various areas through the valley to cut wood, people just carried on. I graduated from high school in 1930, and classmates of mine were Magda Jensen Rutters and Katie Montanaro FitsGerald.

Mr. J: I graduated in 1937 and was in the midths of college when Uncle Sam called. A good of my classmates went on to college.

PL: This is interesting because college was so expensive?

Mr. J: Yes, but my mother helped, she had helped my brother out and he had a job as well as I did, everyone went to work on the side, I had one year at Berkeley.

PL: When did you decide that the paper office was too small?

Mr. J: Right away. Originally it had been a butcher shop, Montanaros, and then it was a bakery, Overgaards, but they were in must a short time, because the building was squalid. Just terrible! So we had been in less tha a year, Richard and I realized that we would have to give up unless we did something to the building so the following year we built a new building. Fortunately this old building was in the middle of the lot and did not go to clear ot the edge. So we hired a couple of carpenters and we helped too, and built clear to the end of the lot around the old building, throwing the old part out the window of the new. (Laughter) The Danish carpenters said it was impossible you can't do that!. So that spurred us on. We did it. Out through the new building windows went the old building. End of Side 2, Tape 1

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

PL: When did Solvang start to change from farming to tourism?

Mr. J: During the war, Victor Borga was here to raise money for the war, and the people came in to see what Solvang looked like.

PL: What years did this happen?

Mr. J: Before 1947 people were operating their businesses for valley residents.

Mr. L: We had only one gift shop, Lila Maxwell's, this was for a long time.

Mr. J: Actually it was sort of a circular route, I would scratch your back if you would scratch mine, it was the carpenters helping the plasters, everyone was working for each other and there was no outside money coming in at all, no tourists. Really it was that article (Saturday Evening Post, 1946) and then other reporters came up and wrote articles themselves. Then the people read about us and came up to see. Solvang was a perfect subject for these stories and we seemed to fall into it, with making the buildings Danish Provencal. We at the newspaper were forced to write and publish stories about the town, we were the only public relations firm in town, there was no

Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce. Whenever a writer came to town they came to the Valley News for information. They would ask for pictures, etc, we were over worked.

Mr. L: To answer your question, I don't think anybody in Solvang envisioned anything like what has happened. Most of them were old timers that wish it had never happened. It did, and it will continue. There is no way it will change at this point in time.

Mr. J: We previously had wanted a smoke free industry, we made inquiries hoping to get some money coming in, in addition to what we, ourselves were generating. We were asking back and forth so this was the answer to the smokeless industry, the tourist industry. It was perfect, you don't have the extra....well like policemen, and extra people to accomodate such an industry. And they (the shop owners) can charge a good mark-up on the goods. Much more so than manufacturing hose nozzles or whatever.

Mr. L: I mentioned the Post Office being on Main St. then, but I can remember back in the early 1930's that about 11:30 each morning, all the business men would go across the street to the vacant lot, next to the post office where they would pitch horseshoes for 30 minutes or so and no one locked their doors. You would walk up and down the

street and know everyone, not so today.

Mr. J: Solvang in those days would be reminiscent of a mid-western town, even to the style of the buildings, (after all these people had come from the mid-west)

PL: I have been told that it was Ray Paaske who started this provencal architecture?

Mr. J: Ray sort of started it, but I would say it was Ferd (Ferdenand) Sorensen, and lets face it no one is going to blow my horn unless I do, I was the one who asked Ferd to make a sketch of Main Street the way he would like to see it. Ray went to work about the same time, he manufactured his own block, he and his brother, Youngie, so it was a community effort of myself, Ferd Sorensen, and the Paaskes. Ferd even went back to Denmark and made sketches and took photographs. Then if you didn't follow the lead you were out. Because people won't rent your building unless you design it to lure the tourists in. So it ended up that we didn't need a town body to enforce the architecture it was just a matter of accepting. You had to do it or the tourists would not come to your place or a renter would not rent.

PL: Do you know of any other community that this has happened to?

Mr. L: Only Carmel and that was already an art center.

Mr. J: We seem to have been going on here for quite awhile, Phil, I am grateful that you came in because it has stimulated my answers. Let me give credit to my Uncle Alfred as he was a great civic leader. It was he who made all the arrangements when Crown Prince Fredrick and Princess Ingrid came to Solvang. Alfred took charge when Lawrence Melchior came to town for a benefit. He was a strange little fellow and some of the merchants called him, "The Little Shrew", but he was all for Solvang. He loved to give parties. He was a great worker for the community, so I would like to give him credit. He was still working during those years but died shortly after the war.

PL: Did your grandparents die here in Solvang?

Mr. J: They both died here. All I can remember of my Grandfather Jorgensen was seeing him cutting wood or working in the garden. It's too bad, I wish I had learned Danish. The Danes in those days were proud to be Americans and my father didn't want Danish spoken in the house.

Mr. L: I can recall walking the streets of Solvang and hearing the children speaking Danish while playing. And that went on for quite awhile during the 20's and 30's. The Danes were very difficult to get in with (to make friends with non-Danes), but as I was in the newspaper, I didn't have too much trouble. And this attitude continued through

the 1960's too, the Danes were a close community.

PL: Was it the concensus of the community that Atterdag had to go?

Mr. J: Yes, there was no way to save it, it was past renovation. The termites, and hornets had taken over and the wood had deteriorated to a bad point. I was tempted to start a campaign to save the building. From the outside it looked good but inside it was very badly damaged. It was a shame. The Lutheran Home was a perfect substitute for the college, and Atterdag means, "Another Day" so this retirement home was perfect.

PL: Why did you decide to sell the Valley News?

Mr. J: I was tired out. I had wanted out for many years but I didn't want out until there was a better home for the Valley News. When I bought the American Legion Clubhouse and got it renovated, then it was a new home for the newspaper. Richard Kintzel had left the paper after about 8 years or so, I was in it for 30 years. I think I left not only because I was tired out but I found myself in a pattern, week after week, and also I had lost the insentive, going from hot lead linotype to off set, it was no longer a craft but a simple way of making money. When I had the paper, we didn't put out a paper, eavery paper we put out we were proud of. Now I can see that I could not do that today. PL: On the masthead of the paper

there is a notation of "Award Winning", when did that come about?

Mr. J: We had received at least 15 awards over the years, but not since I got out. (Laughter) These were national and state awards for excellence. There were about ten different categories to submit to but you don't make money off awards. That notation can stay at the top of the newspaper forever. I shouldn't be critical of the present ownership. This is a whole new era.

PL: When did King Merrill come to work for you?

Mr. J: I would say probably four or five years after we took over, so he was here quite awhile. He did go into Lompoc and worked for that paper. He wanted to buy the Valley News and it was very unfortunate that he could not. Right now King is quite loyal to the paper but I think he would like to retire.

PL: What are you doing with yourself these days?

Mr. J: As you know I wrote a book, "My West", and I am working on a new book on the desert country, old gold mines and such with photographs that I have taken. When I was tied down on the paper I could not get away. I was a bachelor for many years and when there was time my friends and I would go to abandon towns in the hinterland and take photographs. I have also done interviews with old times here in Solvang, and maybe a book will come of that too. There is also a book I would like to do on my experiences

ovearseas for three and half years.

PL: Your mother was very important to you, what about her?

Mr. J: When I got back from the service and started to work at the paper, I built a house and asked her to live there with me as my housekeeper, so she retired from the coffee shop and was happy to do so. It was a nice arrangement. She finally could relax, she was wonderful.

PL: We have had a good visit, and I have one last question, What do you foresee for the future of Solvang?

Mr. J: What I see is "killing the goose that laid the golden egg", the reason people came here was because of the enchantment of the area, and when there is no long that enchantment we are going to loose it all. When this becomes encased in smog and subdivisions the charm will be gone. Lets try to keep industry out. We are lucky to havea the country side all around us and this beautiful scenery.

PL: My thanks to Mr. Karl Jorgensen and Mr. Phil Lockwood for this interview today.